
INDIA IN 2003

Pre-Electoral Maneuvering and the Prospects for Regional Peace

Lawrence Sáez

Abstract

This article focuses on the electoral strategies adopted by the dominant national political parties in anticipation of the 2004 general election. The success of these strategies is apt to depend on the results of various state legislative assembly elections. We conclude with observations on recent realignments in India's foreign policy, particularly with respect to China and Pakistan.

Less than a year before the next general election is held in India, 2003 proved to test the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) faltering mandate. Domestically, the year was dominated by the outcome of state assembly elections in one-third of India's states. These elections, colored by the aftermath of the 2002 massacre of Muslims in the state of Gujarat, also signaled the electoral strategies that could succeed in 2004 at the national level with the two principal political parties. Internationally, as the significance of the Afghanistan issue waned, India faced new challenges in relation to China, its principal regional economic competitor. Coming to the brink of a potentially explosive border war with Pakistan, India had to determine what course of action to take with its chief regional military rival. Moreover, India had to decide how best to respond to domestic terrorism.

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State-Level Deterioration of the Bharatiya Janata Party

The year 2002 culminated with the cathartic victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state assembly elections in Gujarat. The victory of the BJP in this state was remarkable, since earlier in the year Gujarat had been the site of some of the most egregious instances of anti-Muslim violence in India since Independence. Many observers of the Gujarat polls in 2002 feared that the BJP's decision to wage an electoral campaign exploiting the most aggressive aspects of Hindu chauvinism could spill over into subsequent subnational electoral contests. Moreover, in light of a strong anti-incumbent mood, the February 26, 2003, state assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh tested the solidarity of the BJP at the regional level.

With his party's regional political support crumbling and general elections looming in 2004, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee decided, for the 10th time since 1999, to reshuffle his cabinet. The January 29, 2003, reshuffle witnessed the return of Arun Jaitley, the former Union Law minister and arguably one of the most capable members of Vajpayee's cabinet. This time around, he was selected to occupy the same post that he held before his dismissal from the cabinet last year.

The return of Arun Jaitley to the NDA cabinet could have important implications for the BJP's electoral tactics in state assembly elections. After his ouster, Jaitley was granted the unenviable task of being the chief spokesperson and general secretary for controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. While Narendra Modi campaigned in the state, making frequent use of incendiary communal rhetoric, Jaitley pragmatically set out to mobilize the BJP's party machinery in order to get likely voters to the polls. The BJP's ability to mobilize party members on a selective basis, rather than crudely exploiting chauvinistic fervor among its most likely voters, may have been one of the reasons why the BJP has been able to stay afloat in Gujarat.

Attempting to replicate the success of Gujarat, concerted efforts were made to mobilize the BJP's party machinery in the state of Himachal Pradesh. In the previous state assembly election in 1998, the BJP and the Congress Party each won 31 seats in the 68-seat assembly. Nevertheless, the BJP was able to form a governing coalition with the Himachal Vikas Congress (HVC), which had obtained five seats. Based on these results, many analysts anticipated a hotly contested race in the state in 2003. Despite Himachal Pradesh's crumbling economy, BJP strategists believed that Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal could lead the BJP to a narrow victory by effectively mobilizing voters, thus replicating the incumbent party's success in Gujarat.

Unlike the controversy-filled fiasco in Gujarat, the state assembly election in Himachal Pradesh was a mundane, traditional campaign in which the BJP

highlighted its party's paltry achievements in terms of the state's economic development, while the Congress Party opposition stressed Himachal Pradesh's endemic corruption, chronic unemployment, and dismal fiscal deterioration. Nevertheless, Himachal Pradesh has one of the lowest proportions of population living below the poverty level in India. In light of the closeness of the 1998 contest, the BJP began to grow concerned about the loyalty of its chief legislative ally, the HVC, which had cryptically signaled that it would be willing to form a coalition with the Congress Party.

Less significance was attached to the holding of state assembly elections in February in three other northeastern states: Tripura, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. Given the BJP's already weak legislative presence in these three small states, the electoral outcomes were deemed to have little significance on a national scale. For instance, Tripura is ruled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led coalition, the Left Front. In the previous state assembly election held in 1998, the BJP ran in all 60 assembly constituencies, but won no seats, garnering only 5.87% of the total votes polled. Meghalaya is governed by a Congress Party and Nationalist Congress Party coalition, called the People's Forum of Meghalaya. In the 1998 state assembly election there, the BJP was able to win only three seats in the 60-member state assembly. Likewise, the BJP was electorally absent in Nagaland, a state where it has never won a single legislative seat. There, the Congress Party had a firm legislative hold, controlling 53 out of 60 seats.

The outcome of the state assembly elections in February held an unpleasant surprise for the BJP. Its trouncing in Himachal Pradesh was as spectacular as it was humiliating. Both the Congress Party and the BJP contested all 68 assembly seats. Congress won 40 seats (receiving 40.7% of the total vote) and the BJP won 16 (35.7% of the vote). Although the BJP fared well in terms of vote differential, it suffered a 15-seat loss in the assembly, nearly half of all the seats it obtained in the previous election.

Predictably, the BJP also received a trouncing in Tripura and Meghalaya. In Tripura, the Left Front won 41 seats out of the 60-seat assembly. The BJP won no seats. In Meghalaya, Congress and its ally, the National Congress Party, won 22 and 14 seats, respectively. In Meghalaya's 60-seat assembly, the BJP won only two seats, losing one seat in the wake of its already feeble performance in the 1998 state assembly election. Finally, in Nagaland's 60-seat assembly, the Congress Party and the National People's Front won 21 and 19 seats, respectively. In this state, the BJP performed better than it had in any previous state assembly election, yet won only seven seats.

Further evidence of the deteriorating condition of the BJP at the regional level came with the breakup of the BJP's already tenuous alliance in Uttar Pradesh with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). After the 2002 state assembly in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP became a reluctant minority coalition partner to the

BSP, a party that largely represents *dalit* (literally, downtrodden, outcaste) interests. The resulting alliance led to the selection of Mayawati as chief minister of the state. Although she is only 47 years old, Mayawati has had a sordid and checkered political career and so far has been chief minister of India's largest state on three occasions. In a country not lacking in flamboyant and corrupt politicians, she has nevertheless remained a popular leader among her constituents.

The rift between the BJP and the BSP during the summer of 2003 was prompted by an investigation into Chief Minister Mayawati's relationship to two controversial construction projects, the Taj Heritage Corridor and the Taj Expressway. The Taj Heritage Corridor is a building project that aims to develop a monstrous and unsightly corridor behind the Taj Mahal, India's preeminent architectural landmark. At one point, the project's architects had proposed the building of a shopping mall and, it is said, an amusement park. The Taj Expressway is a proposed eight-lane highway linking Delhi with Agra, the site of the Taj Mahal.

In response to demands by environmentalist groups, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to conduct an investigation of alleged irregularities with the Taj Heritage Corridor and the Taj Expressway. Mayawati, following the start of the CBI investigation, vociferously called for the resignation of India's Tourism and Culture Minister Jagmohan. However, her enthusiasm for calling attention to the criminal irregularities surrounding the Taj Heritage Corridor quickly attenuated, once it was alleged that she had deep financial ties to the building project. Documentation received by the Supreme Court revealed that prior to the granting of licenses to allow construction, Mayawati and several of her confederates had purchased large tracts of land along the proposed path of the Taj Expressway. Mayawati, however, denied that the land acquisition was related to any expectation of lucrative eminent-domain compensation. In August, Mayawati quit her post and vowed to wage a campaign against the BJP. In a Machiavellian turn, the BJP offered its support to Mulayam Singh Yadav, the leader of the Samajwadi Party, hitherto the BJP's archenemy in the state.

Preparations for the 2004 General Election

Given the BJP's dismal performance in Himachal Pradesh and elsewhere, it was widely believed that the date of the general elections in 2004 would depend on the party's performance in the November state assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, and Delhi. If the BJP secured a round of electoral successes in most of these states, notably in the large Hindi-speaking states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, then the party could interpret this as a wave of optimism for its policies and could safely

call for a general election to be held as early as February 2004. Anything but an optimal performance in the state elections would prompt the BJP to hold general elections later in 2004, after the annual fiscal budget is approved in Parliament. Like other federal systems in developing countries, it has become a tradition in India to festoon the central government's budget with populist fiscal measures before an election.

In a meeting of BJP state party presidents held on May 31, 2003, in Hyderabad, the BJP formally outlined its electoral strategy for the remaining 2003 state assembly elections and the general election in 2004. Among the party's various formal strategies in states holding state assembly elections, the leadership favored mobilization of state-level party workers, bringing out a "charge sheet" (police report) in states where the BJP is in opposition, and the holding of statewide *rath yatras* (Hindu-style processions).¹ At the national level, the issue of the BJP's leadership in the next election and its long-term continuity in light of Vajpayee's failing health were the centerpiece of discussion.

The health issue forced the BJP to again face the possibility that it may not be able to position Vajpayee as its national candidate for prime minister. Although Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani is more vigorous than Vajpayee, he is a far more controversial figure among India's minority voters. Thus, in order to win the 2004 general election with an absolute majority, the BJP needs to appeal to moderate voters and to ethnic minorities, but it also needs to mobilize its more determined radical voters without antagonizing its current coalition allies in the governing NDA.

Given this conundrum, BJP party president M. Venkaiah Naidu declared that Vajpayee and Advani represented two sides of the same BJP coin. He declared that the BJP was led by a *vikas purush* (development man) and a *loh purush* (iron man). As the BJP aims to soften its image in preparation for the 2004 election, Naidu's implication was that the hardline ideology that Advani represents would also form part of the BJP plank during the general election. However, in trying to sidestep concerns about leadership continuity (and the inherent changes that would follow from the ideological differences between the two leaders), Naidu unintentionally muddled the issue with his characterization. Vajpayee himself contributed to the confusion when he suggested that the party should march to victory in the 2004 general election under the leadership of Advani. In order to provide a unified front, Naidu categorically declared that Vajpayee would be the BJP's candidate for the prime ministership.

1. The full text of the 25-point Mission 2004–Action Plan is available at <http://www.bjp.org/Naiduji%20Photo/Mission_2004.htm>.

For its part, the Congress Party faced a different set of challenges. With Sonia Gandhi as the unrivaled national party candidate, the Congress Party has not had the leadership struggles that have bedeviled the BJP. Instead, its Achilles' heel is both the lack of a credible candidate for prime minister and the absence of a coherent ideological vision. During the Congress Party's election strategy conclave in Srinagar, the leadership decided that the party should use its pro-poor policies as an election slogan. Lacking any ideological clarity, the Congress Party national leadership instead resorted to questioning the capacity for governance of the NDA coalition. In order to highlight this theme, Gandhi, the Congress Party president, called in August for debate on a no-confidence motion against the NDA government. During the legislative debates, Gandhi presented a mock police report in which she claimed that the NDA government was mired in corruption and had threatened India's national security.

Although Sonia Gandhi is habitually tepid and languorous in her public presentations, she impressed some Congress Party leaders with what they perceived to be dynamic rhetorical attacks against the NDA government. However, the no-confidence motion was swiftly defeated by 312–186, clearly showing that parliamentary support for the NDA coalition is stronger than Gandhi had anticipated. Without offering any positive assessment of how a Congress Party administration would improve governance in India, it is unlikely that voters would be inspired to vote for Sonia Gandhi's party in the forthcoming general election.

Due to its vapid national leadership, the Congress Party has repeatedly failed to capitalize on the regional weakness of the BJP. For this reason, the state assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan also became an unintentional test case of Congress's viability at the national level. Along with nearly a majority of Indian states, both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are governed by the Congress Party. However, in the previous general election, voters in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan voted in favor of the BJP for federal office. Caste has provided an important idiom for many sections of the voting population to organize politically, although almost always within the context of formal party relations. Thus, it appears that many voters split their vote, voting for the Congress Party (or for a non-BJP alternative, often on the basis of caste) for state assembly elections and for the BJP or its allies at the national level.

Congress-ruled Madhya Pradesh is arguably one of the best-governed states in India. For instance, in a sea of chronic subnational fiscal mismanagement, Madhya Pradesh is one of the few states with a fiscal surplus. Chief Minister Digvijay Singh's mixture of innovative development projects at the rural level, combined with ruthless administrative downsizing, has gar-

nered a lot of positive attention internationally.² However, the state has one of the lowest levels of per capita spending on health care in India. Moreover, inevitable accusations of endemic corruption have hampered Singh's ability to highlight his state government's achievements.

In Rajasthan, the situation of the Congress Party was quite similar. Since winning a comfortable margin of victory in the 1998 state assembly election, Congress Party Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had been able to focus on developmental projects, including road construction and drought relief efforts. He also proposed a quota in state government jobs and reservation in university seats for economically disadvantaged upper-caste individuals.

It was clear to the BJP that Digvijay Singh was unlikely to be unseated with a campaign that called into question his state government's developmental achievements. In a brilliant stroke of pre-electoral strategy, Digvijay Singh also attempted to co-opt the BJP from exploiting salient Hindutva issues.³ For instance, Singh proposed a ban on cow slaughter. He also proposed a change of his government's policy regarding the Bhojshala, a religious center at Dhar where the Kamal Maulana mosque shares space with a Hindu shrine. Although the religious site had been the location of clashes between the police and Hindu fundamentalists, Singh proposed that restrictions on Hindu visitors to the site should be relaxed. On an equally sensitive issue, Singh mirrored the BJP's own official stand when he advocated that a Ram temple should be built at Ayodhya.

Following Digvijay Singh's strategy, Ashok Gehlot attempted to undermine the BJP's possible use of communal polarization as a method of mobilizing voters in Rajasthan. Like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan has a small Muslim presence and has avoided some of the communal strife that has plagued other Hindi-belt states. Taking into account the implicit significance of caste in voting patterns, both the Congress Party and the BJP made shrewd electoral calculations, linking a candidate's caste background to match the predominant caste composition in a given electoral constituency. In contrast to Digvijay Singh's soft accommodation to Hindutva issues, Ashok Gehlot decided not to oblige Hindu chauvinists in his state. He banned the distribution of *trishuls* (tridents) by the Hindu chauvinist association, the Vishwa

2. See James Manor, "Madhya Pradesh Experiments with Direct Democracy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36:2 (March 3–9, 2001), pp. 715–16. Also see James Manor, "Towel over Armpit: Small-Time Political Fixers in the States of India," *Asian Survey* 40:5 (September/October 2000), especially p. 826.

3. Hindutva is an abstract term commonly used in Indian political discourse to refer to the ideology of Hindu nationalism. Advocates of Hindutva argue that it is a secular political manifestation on behalf of the protection of certain Hindu rituals and symbols. Opponents of Hindutva view it as an expression that denotes intolerant and chauvinistic Hinduism.

Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, VHP).⁴ He also detained prominent VHP leaders to prevent them from holding rallies and *rath yatras* in Rajasthan.

The BJP revealed its electoral strategy in Madhya Pradesh by naming Uma Bharati, a strident Hindu chauvinist ideologue, as its campaign leader in the state. In the NDA government, Uma Bharati occupies the post of union minister of state for sports, welfare, and youth affairs. However, she is best known for her participation in the spreading of communal fervor that led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid (mosque) at Ayodhya in 1991. Curiously, although Uma Bharati has often been keen to exploit Hindu chauvinist sentiments, she claimed that her electoral campaign in Madhya Pradesh would focus on the state's widespread corruption. Her decision may have been prompted by pragmatism rather than ideology, as she had already angered many members of Hindu chauvinist groups such as the VHP and the Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This rift occurred because in the process of launching a *rath yatra* procession, Uma Bharati had offered a birthday cake to the Hindu god Hanuman at the Hanuman temple in Chhindwara. Members of the VHP and the RSS, among others, believed that the act desecrated the temple because women are barred from entry there. Moreover, allegations that the birthday cake contained eggs—a polluting substance in Hindu rituals—further diminished her image among RSS activists.

A month before the state assembly election, Uma Bharati's actual participation in the poll was under question, as she had not yet filed her nomination papers declaring which constituency she was going to contest. This uncertainty caused some panic within BJP ranks, as Uma Bharati had once declined to participate in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, citing an unspecified severe illness.

The run-up to the state assembly election in Rajasthan also did not lack in drama. The BJP selected Vasundhara Raje Scindia as its chief ministerial candidate. Raje, a charismatic politician of princely lineage, attempted to position herself as an approachable candidate, humbly referring to herself as the people's princess. The choice of a celebrity, although one with some political experience at the federal level as a member of parliament, was a risky one for the BJP's national leadership. They feared that her unorthodox campaigning style would weaken the BJP's image in the state.

Overall, the state legislative assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan became a test of electoral strategies. With the exception of Delhi, the results from the November state assembly elections proved to be a success for the BJP. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP captured 173 seats in a 230-

4. Although the *trishul* is a Hindu religious symbol, it can also be misused as a weapon. Questions about its inappropriate use have led to important religious-freedom cases in India.

seat assembly, increasing its presence there by 51 members since the previous election. The Congress Party only mustered 38 seats, an astonishing loss of 134 seats from the 1998 election. The BJP also captured control of the state assembly of Chhattisgarh, the tribal-dominated state that before its secession from Madhya Pradesh was a bastion of Congress Party political control. Although pre-election polls predicted a close victory by the Congress Party in Rajasthan, the BJP also pummeled its way to victory. The BJP increased its legislative presence from 33 seats in 1998 to 120 seats in 2003. The Congress Party was only able to hold on to 57 seats in Rajasthan's 200-seat assembly, a net loss of 96 seats. The results from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had important implications for the timing of the general election in 2004. Based on the results from these states, the BJP was able to use anti-incumbent sentiment to unseat two of the most capable, though flawed, Congress Party chief ministers.

Although the chief national political parties tried to justify the results of various state assembly elections in 2003 as a test case for the success of a given electoral strategy, it is clear that the electorate is voicing a strong anti-incumbent mood. At the start of 2003, the BJP was the chief victim of this trend and there were concerns that this would augur poorly for its chances to win the general election in 2004. For its part, the Congress Party failed to capitalize on the regional weakness of the BJP, and by the end of 2003, its prospects for electoral success in 2004 had dimmed considerably. Interpreting the results of the November state assembly elections as an indicator of the BJP's resurgence, Vajpayee will most likely dissolve parliament in February 2004 and call for general elections to take place in May, avoiding any potential economic downturn that a poor monsoon season might provoke.

New Directions in Foreign Policy?

Unlike its domestic policy, the NDA coalition has been responsible for a renewed dynamism in foreign policy issues. During the Janata Party's interlude (1977–79), India temporarily appeared to steer a new direction in foreign policy. Bold diplomatic initiatives by then Foreign Minister Vajpayee sought to restore trust in India among its regional neighbors, particularly China and Pakistan. Attempting to replicate the success of his 1979 visit, Vajpayee visited China from June 22 to 27, 2003. He held separate meetings with powerful political figures, including Jiang Zemin, chairman of the Central Military Commission, Wu Bangguo of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and Vice President Zeng Qinghong.

Vajpayee's visit to China had some historical significance because it was the first by an Indian prime minister since Rajiv Gandhi's trip in February 1988. More importantly, Vajpayee's visit signaled a potential rapprochement with China, notably with an intent to put contentious border issues aside,

while favoring areas of mutual economic interest. From a diplomatic perspective, the new spirit of cooperation was heralded a day after Vajpayee arrived in Beijing. On June 23, Chinese President Hu Jintao and Vajpayee signed a Joint Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between India and China.

The swiftness with which the Declaration was signed appeared to work to China's benefit. The Declaration contained an intriguingly worded statement in relation to sensitive border issues, including India's stand on Tibet and China's stand on the annexation of Sikkim, an Indian state along the Chinese border. In what appeared to be a subtle departure from India's posture on the question of Tibet, India explicitly recognized the Tibet Autonomous Region as being part of the territory of China. Moreover, in the Declaration, India reiterated that it would not allow Tibetans living in India to engage in anti-Chinese political activities.

However, New Delhi failed to receive reciprocal Chinese recognition of India's 1975 annexation of Sikkim. In the Declaration, China fell short of outright recognition of Sikkim as being a part of India; in fact, it did not mention the state by name. Instead, the Declaration stated both sides would work together to "maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas" and to seek a mutually acceptable solution through bilateral consultation. Both sides also agreed to implement existing agreements on border issues, including those that provided "clarification of the Line of Actual Control."⁵

From New Delhi's perspective, the most important element of the Joint Declaration was the prospect for growing economic cooperation between India and China. Like many of its neighbors, India has failed to replicate China's spectacular export-led economic growth and its ability to attract foreign direct investment. In light of this asymmetrical regional competition, New Delhi positioned itself as a potential destination for China's rapidly expanding corporations. In return, Indian exports could have greater access to China's markets. In order to increase bilateral complementarities on this front, the Joint Declaration called for a Joint Study Group to recommend potential areas of economic cooperation. In addition to setting a target of \$10 billion in bilateral trade by 2005, India and China pledged to increase their cooperation on World Trade Organization (WTO) issues.

Although the NDA had pledged to help build a system of trade and economic cooperation through an expanded global system of trade preferences among developing nations, until recently New Delhi had not taken a very active role in pursuing this goal. However, partly as a result of China and

5. The full text of the Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China is available at <<http://mea.dev.nic.in/ind-chn-decla.htm>>.

India's agreement to cooperate on areas of mutual benefit relating to trade, New Delhi decided to take a more vocal stand during the WTO's ministerial meeting in Cancún. In a revolt spearheaded by Malaysian Trade Minister Rafidah Aziz, the proposals by the U.S., the European Union (EU), and Japan for new WTO rules on investment, competition, trade facilitation, and transparency in government procurement were roundly rejected by India and many other developing nations. India, along with 21 other developing countries, instead proposed reform and liberalization of agricultural and farm trade policies in the EU. The critical Indian demand was for sharp reduction of U.S. and EU subsidies to cotton farmers. These subsidies have prompted Indian cotton exporters to lobby for an increase in the 10% import duty on cotton.

India also appeared prepared to take a more independent stand vis-à-vis the United States. Although India had been one of the most vocal supporters of the United States during the military intervention in Afghanistan, it voiced opposition to American involvement in Iraq. During the first Gulf War in 1991, India had been one of the few countries to oppose the American-led recapture of Kuwait. At the time, India had minuscule foreign exchange reserves, and was thus highly vulnerable to sudden price changes in oil imports from the Gulf region. This opposition proved very costly for India, because it later helped catapult the country into a dramatic balance of payments crisis. This year, however, the Indian government's opposition to the American-led military involvement in Iraq was guided far more by pragmatism. At the UN Security Council, India advocated a peaceful and multilateral resolution to the standoff.

Once the war in Iraq started, New Delhi's opposition to the conflict continued. In response to intense domestic pressures—and just hours before Baghdad fell to American forces—both houses of Parliament passed resolutions condemning American involvement and calling for the immediate withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq. Nevertheless, in order to avoid a repeat performance of any repercussions from its 1991 opposition to American involvement in Iraq, Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha promptly set out to explain the parliamentary stance to his counterpart in the United States. American State Department officials, in turn, sought to buttress Indian support for its fight against terrorism, namely by calling for India to collaborate with Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir.

Domestic Terrorism and India's Relations with Pakistan

Given the well-documented instances of cross-border incursions from Pakistan, the scourge of domestic terrorism in India has been a constant threat to regional stability. Throughout 2003, tensions along the LoC (line of control)

remained high, particularly since Kashmiri terrorist attacks against Indian forces did not diminish. Such attacks have now become commonplace, and in some instances, they have also affected civilian assets. For instance, on March 24, there was a massacre of 24 Hindus in the town of Nadimargh, making it 2003's bloodiest attack against Hindus living in Jammu and Kashmir. In response, the government of India claimed to have undertaken a major counterinsurgency operation in Jammu and Kashmir. The military operation, codenamed Sarp Vinash (Snake Eradication), involved major offensives in the Surankote and Hil Kaka areas of Jammu and Kashmir.

The year's most noteworthy terrorist attack was the dual bombings in Mumbai on August 25. One of the car bombs detonated in the parking lot outside the Gateway of India, one of the country's most photogenic colonial monuments. A second car bomb exploded almost simultaneously near the Zaveri bazaar, a market renowned for its jewelry. The combined death toll was 50, with 140 injured. No specific terrorist group claimed responsibility. Based on traces of the explosive Sentex in the bombs, the culprits were initially believed to be linked with either the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM, Legion of Mohammed) or the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). Later, individuals arrested in connection with the August 25 bombings declared that they represented a group called the Gujarat Muslim Revenge Force (GMRF), apparently formed in response to the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat a year earlier. The individuals arrested, though, claimed to have received instruction from the Pakistani-sponsored terrorist outfit, the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT, Army of the Pure).

On August 30, Indian government attempts to repress further instances of Kashmiri terrorism scored a critical success with the killing—during a bold pre-dawn raid—of Ghazi Baba, one of the most prominent leaders of the JeM. This group is credited with some of the most serious terrorist attacks in India, including those on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, and on the state assembly of Jammu and Kashmir on October 1, 2001.

In spite of the potential for cross-border hostilities between India and Pakistan, 2003 slowly witnessed an unlikely effort to conciliate basic diplomatic differences. The rapprochement was slow to build and had to face some challenges. As early as February, for instance, Pakistan's acting high commissioner in India, Jalil Abbas Jilani, was expelled for having alleged financial links with the Kashmiri separatist coalition, the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). After Jilani's arrest, his Indian counterpart was promptly expelled from Pakistan. In March, the U.S. State Department exerted diplomatic pressure, formally asking India to resume bilateral talks with Pakistan. This initial request was coolly received in Indian government circles because it came a day after the March massacre in Nadimargh. Never-

theless, on April 18, Vajpayee released a set of specific peace initiatives to his Pakistani counterpart.

American diplomatic pressure began to take a more precise shape. In May, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage visited South Asia to attempt to outline a roadmap to precipitate negotiations between both countries. During his visit to Pakistan, Armitage purportedly received a firm assertion from President Pervez Musharraf that border incursions across the LoC had virtually ended. Armitage relayed such assurances to New Delhi. Although New Delhi insiders were incredulous of these assertions, the external pressure helped promote talks for the third peace initiative since the BJP-led coalition first took power in 1998.

Both countries decided to restore full diplomatic relations by reciprocally naming a new high commissioner. On June 30, the newly appointed Pakistani high commissioner was one of the individuals to enter India through the border town of Wagah. Following the formal presentation of India's peace proposals, Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali responded positively to Vajpayee's April initiatives, voicing his support especially for the resumption of all sporting and rail transportation links. Additional bilateral negotiations took place on a broader range of confidence-building measures, such as the proposed establishment of a bus link across the LoC between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, the respective capitals of Indian-held and Pakistani-held Kashmir. Details on establishing more comprehensive civil aviation and rail links are currently under negotiation. Likewise, Pakistan proposed a ceasefire along the LoC. Although negotiations on these rapidly developing issues are far from representing the normalization of relations, these symbolic steps could signal welcome relief for Indo-Pakistani security concerns in South Asia.